

Engagement Definitions

Terms

- **Engagement** - Useful as a generic term to explore all approaches of engaging stakeholders, rather than to describe a specific process. It can be taken to cover a whole spectrum of different types of engagement and activities, as set out in the typology of engagement ([see tools and guidance](#)).
- **Participation** – A term that has much overlap with engagement, it is associated with the importance of involving wider groups of people in decisions, services and design. It is generally used more when talking about involving citizens more in decisions.
- **Consultation** – One type of engagement that obtains feedback on policy options and decisions. Often used as a formal part of the policy-making process to inform the detail of a decision ([see tools and guidance](#)). Consultation can vary in depth and quality and may involve deliberative workshops, online tools or simply written responses to a document.
- **Dialogue** - Commonly used to mean a process within which interested parties come together to discuss an issue and develop a common resolution. Often working with a third party facilitator to manage the process of discussion, the work is usually explicitly about maximising common ground, and building consensus.
- **Deliberation** often mis-used in place of 'dialogue', but has a narrower meaning. A simple, practical definition is "to discuss and think through an issue together". It is often used to suggest a process which seeks to immerse participants in the issues and dilemmas of a topic before opinions are expressed.
- **Social/Market/Opinion Research** explores social structures, people's attitudes, values, behaviours and the motivations and barriers within society. It is an extractive form of engagement and involves gathering information either through *qualitative* (more subjective) or *quantitative* (more objective, statistical) research.
- **Stakeholder** As with 'engagement', we find the most useful way to use this term is as a generic way of referring to anyone who has an interest or 'stake' in the subject or the engagement process under discussion - from interested agencies and organisations, to local communities and individuals. It is often used to distinguish interested parties from the (general) public.
- **Public.** Used to describe those people and communities who are not (or not yet) directly interested or impacted by the issues being discussed, nor are they satisfactorily represented by any existing stakeholders. For example, a national issue such as building nuclear power stations has many active stakeholders. However, people outside of stakeholder groups and beyond local "nuclear communities" also have a stake although they may, individually, have chosen not to concern themselves with the issue thus far.

Methods

- **Citizens' Jury** a small panel of non-specialists, modelled on the structure of a criminal jury. The group set out to examine an issue of public significance in detail and deliver a "verdict".
- **Citizens' Summit** deliberative meetings involving large numbers of people (typically between 500-5000) and using communication technology to facilitate discussions. The technology, which includes electronic voting, text messages, and online surveys, makes it possible to engage large numbers of people in the same place, at the same time.
- **Deliberative workshops** a form of facilitated group discussion that provide participants with the opportunity to consider an issue in depth, challenge each other's opinions and develop their views/arguments to reach an informed end position. They can take anything from a few hours to several days to conduct.
- **Focus groups** guided discussions of a small group of 6-12 people. They are normally one-off sessions although several may be run simultaneously in different locations. A typical focus group lasts one or two hours and is normally recorded and a report is produced of the feedback. Focus groups provide useful information on how people respond to particular questions or issues, but the short amount of time limits the depth of discussion that can be had
- **Online consultations** utilise the internet to ask a group of people their opinion on an issue (typically a policy in the development stages). An unlimited number of participants can be sent information about the subject or download it online and respond via email or comment on the website.
- **Online forum** a web tool which allows discussions to be held online. It allows participants to post their own comments online which distinguishes it from one way communication tools such as email bulletins.
- **Participatory budgeting** an umbrella term which covers a variety of mechanisms that delegate power or influence over local budgets, investment priorities and economic spending to citizens. It involves citizens directly in making decisions about budget issues, either on a small scale at the service or neighbourhood level or on a more strategic level at a city or state level.